

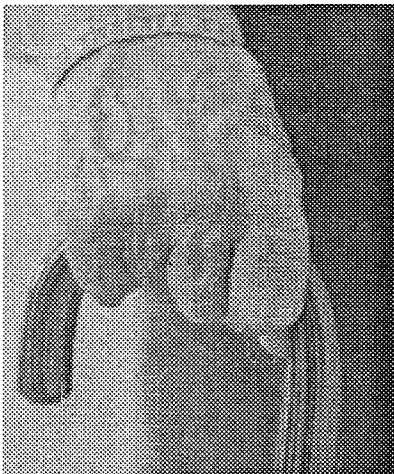


## Making Meetings Effective: 10 Tips for Hosting a Great Meeting

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### #1 Be Prepared

- Send invitations at least two weeks in advance of the meeting date.
- Put together an "Everything Box." An Everything Box is a portable container with everything you need to host a meeting away from your office supply room. Pens, pencils, trace paper, magic markers in many colors, sign in sheets, tape that doesn't take the paint off of walls, push pins, nametags, and anything else you think you will need. Keep a check list of the contents taped to the inside lid of the Everything Box so you can make to replenished if after each meeting.
- Time to set up. On the day of the meeting, arrive at the site at least an hour early to set up.



Anticipate Access for All--Pick an  
ADA Accessible Meeting Location

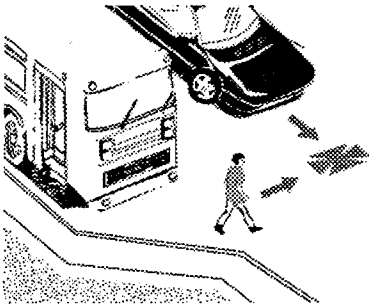
- Visit the meeting location in advance. Look at the room to make sure it meets your needs for the meeting. Check the following things:
  - Is the location accessible for people with difficulty walking or in wheelchairs?
  - Where are the restrooms?
  - What is the best way to set up the room? Does part of your agenda have small breakout groups? Do you need separate rooms for this?
  - If you're showing slides, can you make the room dark enough for people to see them. Is there a screen?
  - Where are the exits in case of emergency?
  - Where should you put up signs to let people know about the meeting room?

### #2 Be a Good Host

- Smiles everyone, smiles. When people arrive, do your best to welcome them and set them at ease. Give them a quick overview of the meeting, have them sign in and fill out a name tag. The more comfortable you make people, the more likely it is they will treat you respectfully.
- Food and beverages. Whenever the budget allows, bring food or at a minimum coffee/tea/water. If you are asking people to attend a meeting at a meal time, it is important to try and bring food.
- Childcare or activities for kids. Childcare can be costly, but if your main audience is parents, than you are more likely to get a larger group if you provide childcare. A less costly alternative is creating a place at the meetings where kids can draw, read or play quietly within view of their parents.
- Introduce yourself and others. Always take the time in your agenda to introduce yourself and the people from your agency or firm. If you have 30 people or less, have everyone introduce themselves and say why they are attending the meeting. This simple act can make people feel more at ease, and will allow you to determine if you need to modify the agenda (see #3 below).



Small working groups are the "meat" of the agenda for a community meeting in Honolulu.



Clear, easy to grasp graphics are useful meeting tools.  
(Graphic courtesy of UNC-HSRC)

### #3 The Importance of an Agenda

- Establish meeting goals. Prior to setting the meeting agenda, know what you want to accomplish in the meeting and map out a plan to get there.
- Always have a clearly defined agenda. Make sure you have enough time to accomplish all the agenda items, and leave time for discussion. Your first agenda item should be a walk through the agenda.
- Stick to your agenda. As the facilitator, it is your job to make sure that you bring the group through the agenda in the amount of time scheduled. Don't keep people late because you couldn't get through the agenda, or if you must go over time, make sure to check with the meeting participants to they can adjust their plans accordingly
- Be willing to shift the order of agenda topics or the time allotted as needed to fit with the interest of the participants and your goals. For example, if twelve of the twenty people at the meeting are concerned about one of the trail crossings described in your project, you might opt to devote more time to that agenda item. You can add an agenda item as long as the new item does not detract from your meeting goals.

### #4 Graphics and Notes

- Use graphics whenever possible. Make sure they are large, clear and easy to grasp in a brief amount of time. If your graphics are not large enough to see from the back of the room, then you need to give people a hand out they can refer to while you use the big map in the front of the room. Overhead projections and slides are an effective way to present graphics to a large group. Treat display text the same was as you would a graphic image. It must be large enough for people to read from the back of the room.
- Use lists of numbers or text judiciously in presentations or not at all. Lists of numbers, tables and/or text are not visually interesting meeting tools. If the purpose of your meeting is to review data, pick a tool that can help you make the data interesting to the viewer. Powerpoint or slides with graphics that illustrate the data can be used effectively.
- Take notes in large format on flip charts. Designate a notetaker. It is difficult for one person to facilitate and take notes at the same time. Taking notes on flip charts is a good way to record comments so that the entire group can follow the discussion. Flip chart notes give you the ability to go back through the comments with the group and define the highest priority items. They provide you with a record of the meeting and can be easily translated into a meeting summary.

### #5 Check Expectations

- Will decisions be made at the meeting? Do people think you will be making decisions at the meeting? If you advertised that a decision will be made and due to a change in schedule this will not happen, let people know. Many people will only come to meetings if they think their input is critical to the decisions being made. For example, if a person is attending your meeting to influence the location of a trail crossing and recent engineering data has forced your team to put off making the decision on the crossing location until the next meeting, share this information at the start of the meeting. Some people may choose to leave or they may be interested enough in the project to stay. However, if they stay with unmet expectations, they may choose to be disruptive.



Most often, "difficult" people are in need of information. Listen, be polite and don't let them derail your agenda.

## #6 "Difficult" People

- There are difficult people at your meeting. More often than not, "difficult" people are confused about the project, concerned about how it will impact their life, and want you to know they are frustrated. Stay calm. Be polite yet firm. Let them voice their concern and let them know you heard what they are saying.
- Keep control of the meeting. Address their concerns but DO NOT let them run the meeting or force you to sway from your agenda.
- Have a resource person(s) with you. Direct the difficult person to the resource person in a pre-arranged location. They can get their question answered, and you can move forward with the rest of the meeting participants. Remember that everyone is at the meeting for a reason, if one person dominates the discussion, it not only is a problem for you, it is also a problem for the people who came to hear item 4 on the agenda and you are only on item 2 and the time is running short.

## #7 Gauge Your Audience

Every facilitator has his or her own style. Hopefully, it is not too different from you personality. If you've got a goofy personality, try to tone it down and keep in mind that you are at this meeting representing an agency, client or other group. If you are too formal, you come across that way. If you are too informal, people may not take you seriously. Strike a balance that is comfortable for you and lets you control the group as needed. Similarly, every audience has its own personality. Introductions at the beginning of a meeting can help you gauge the personality of your audience. Are they angry? Serious? Lighthearted? Respond to their personality and always be respectful of your audience.

## #8 Use Clear Language

Jargon is elitist, offputting and difficult to follow. It also has a way of creeping into our presentations. Do your best to explain technical terms, remove or drastically reduce jargon from your presentations and handouts.

## #9 Always Have a Plan B

Be prepared for your best laid plans to go awry. Perfect meetings are an infrequent occurrence. Stay calm and always have a Plan B. This is where your advance preparation pays off. If your slide projector bulb blows, either carry a spare or be prepared to do the meeting without slides. More often than not, you'll need at least a few chapters from your Plan B. And as Ted Meyers said this morning, "if the battery goes, I'll just wing it.." And he could.

## #10 What are the Next Steps??

Let people know what they need to pay attention to next: another meeting time, the day when council will be making the decision, or the date the station opens and the bike lockers will be ready for use. Have an idea of how you are going to keep people updated on the project. If you took notes on flip charts during the meeting, you have a draft meeting summary already started. Add meeting stats (where, when and the topic of the meeting) attach the sign in sheet and any other information people may have requested at the meeting. Remember that during your meeting, you trained a group of people in the finer points of your project. Use them as a resource. If they are interested in the project, you are likely to see them again. Remember who they are when your elected officials ask for a few constituents they can talk to monitor the public's view of the project.